

LACI PETERSON AND THE MEDIA RESPONSE



2006 National COPS Conference Presentation

Chief Roy Wasden
Modesto Police Department
Modesto California



LACI PETERSON AND THE MEDIA RESPONSE



“When the National Media moves to your town...”

What happens when your agency and community become the focus of a high profile case that gets the attention of the National Media?



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A Typical Press Conference. Before...



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...And After. This is what we had to adjust to



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Body Identification / Peterson Arrest Press Conference - April 18th, 2003



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**YOU KNOW IT WILL BE
A LOT OF WORK
WHEN THESE FOLKS SHOW UP
IN YOUR TOWN!**



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Parking Problems



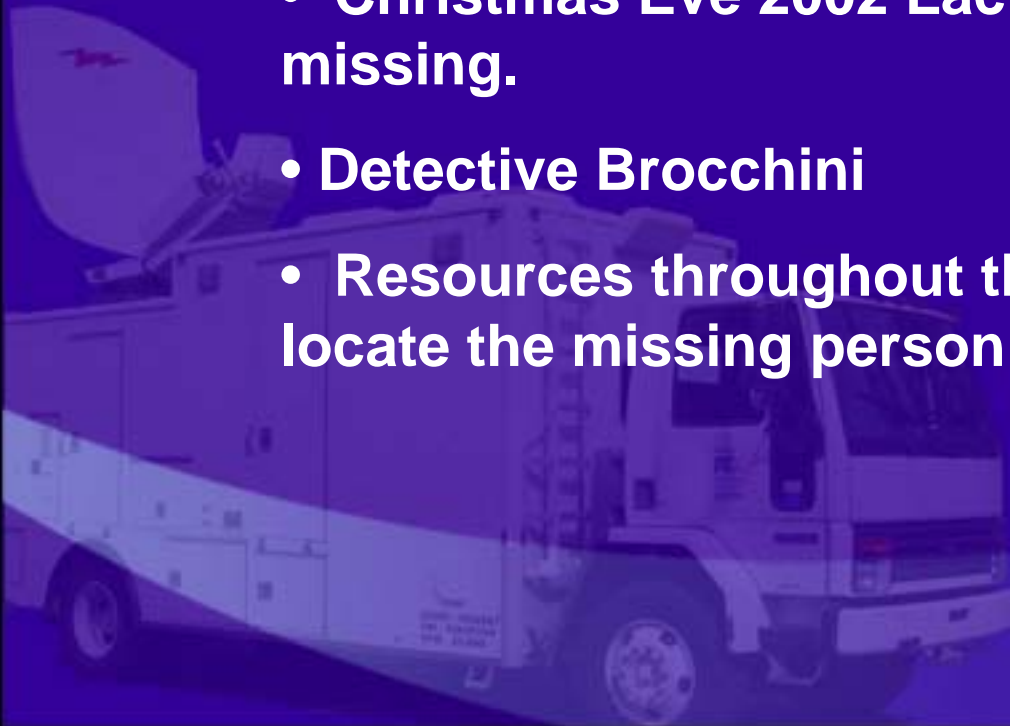
The constant mass of media trucks and vehicles created a problem with parking in front of the Police Department and County Courthouse

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Laci Peterson

- Christmas Eve 2002 Laci Peterson is reported missing.
- Detective Brocchini
- Resources throughout the county are used to locate the missing person.



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Missing Persons Poster

This was the
final missing
persons poster
that was
circulated
through out the
country

Search for Laci Peterson
MISSING
\$500,000 REWARD
(For Information Leading to a Safe Return)



Laci (Rocha) Peterson

Age: 27
Height: 5'4"
Brown Eyes & Brown Hair
8 Months Pregnant

Unmarried and Previously Single
Pregnant, Single, Married

Amber Alert Status Not Set

Last Seen on 12/24/02 at 9:30 am. She was seen near Dry Creek in the La Loma Area in Modesto, Ca. Laci was last seen wearing black pants and a white long sleeve top. Laci also has a sunflower tattoo on her left ankle.

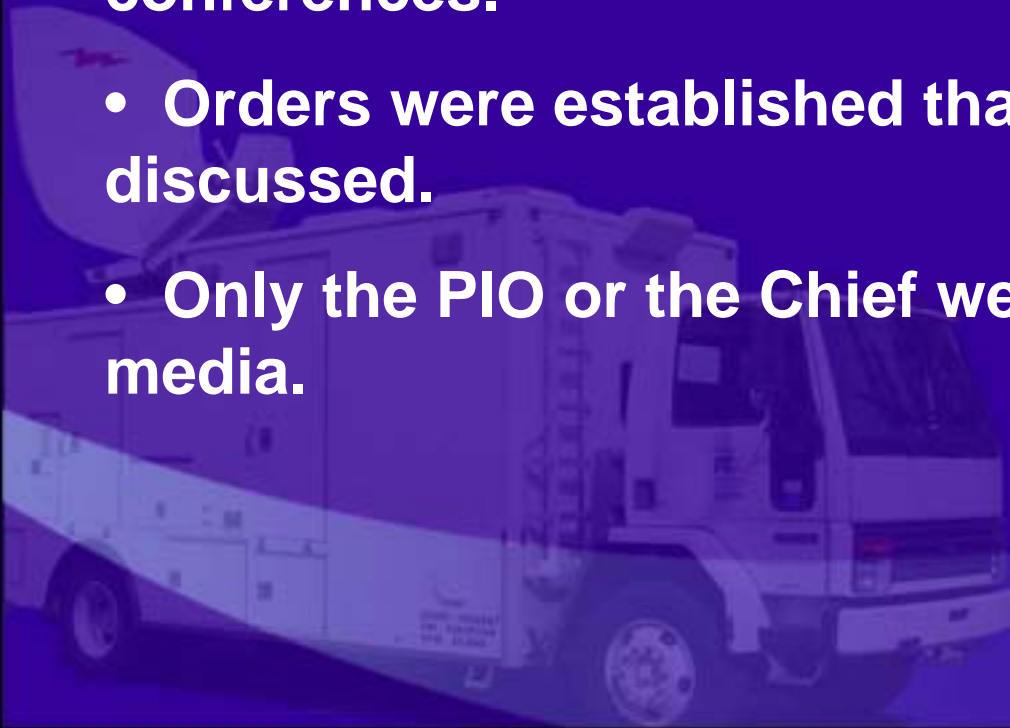
Anyone with information should call the Modesto Police Dept. Anonymous hotline at **(209) 342-6166**

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Establishment of ICS system

- PIO set up most releases to be at formal press conferences.
- Orders were established that the case was not to be discussed.
- Only the PIO or the Chief were authorized to talk with media.



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Laci's family organized a New Year's Eve vigil at East La Loma Park.



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The Vigil - December 31st, 2002



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PRESS CONFERENCES

ANSWERING QUESTIONS FOR DAILY PRESS BRIEFINGS

(EVEN WHEN THERE IS NO NEW INFORMATION)



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Daily Press Conferences



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Control Your Message

**DON'T ALLOW THE MEDIA
TO CONTROL WHEN OR WHERE
YOU DO YOUR
PRESS CONFERENCES.**



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GET HELP! YOU CAN'T DO IT ALL!

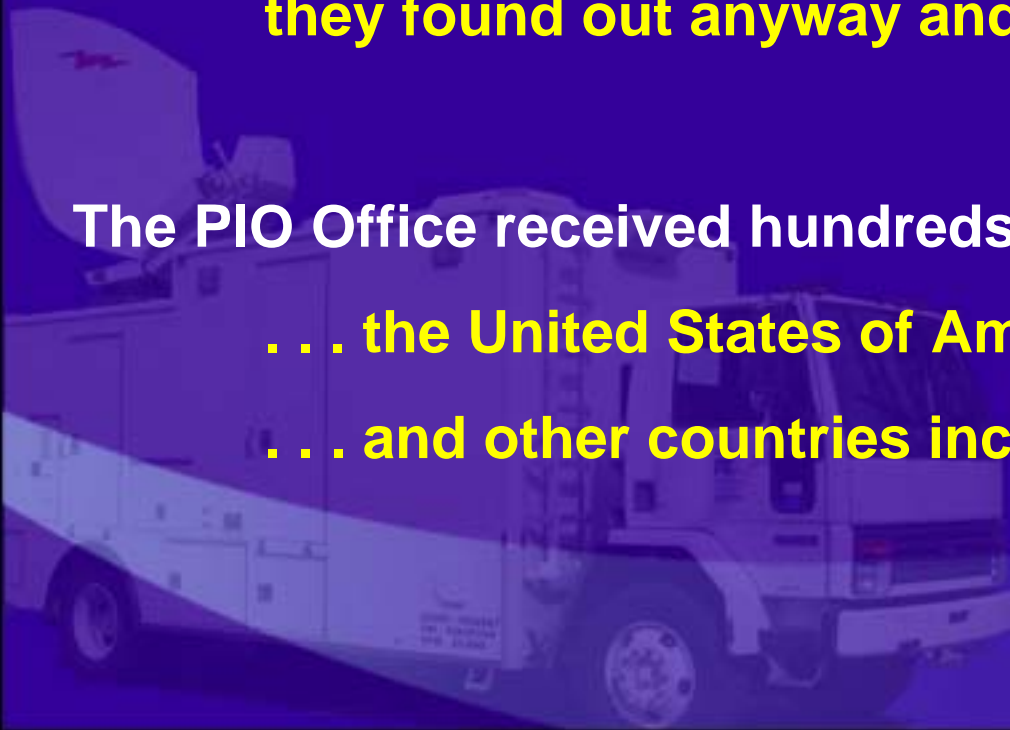
Media was not told of search locations.

they found out anyway and attempted to get interviews.

The PIO Office received hundreds of media calls from all over:

... the United States of America

... and other countries including Canada and France!

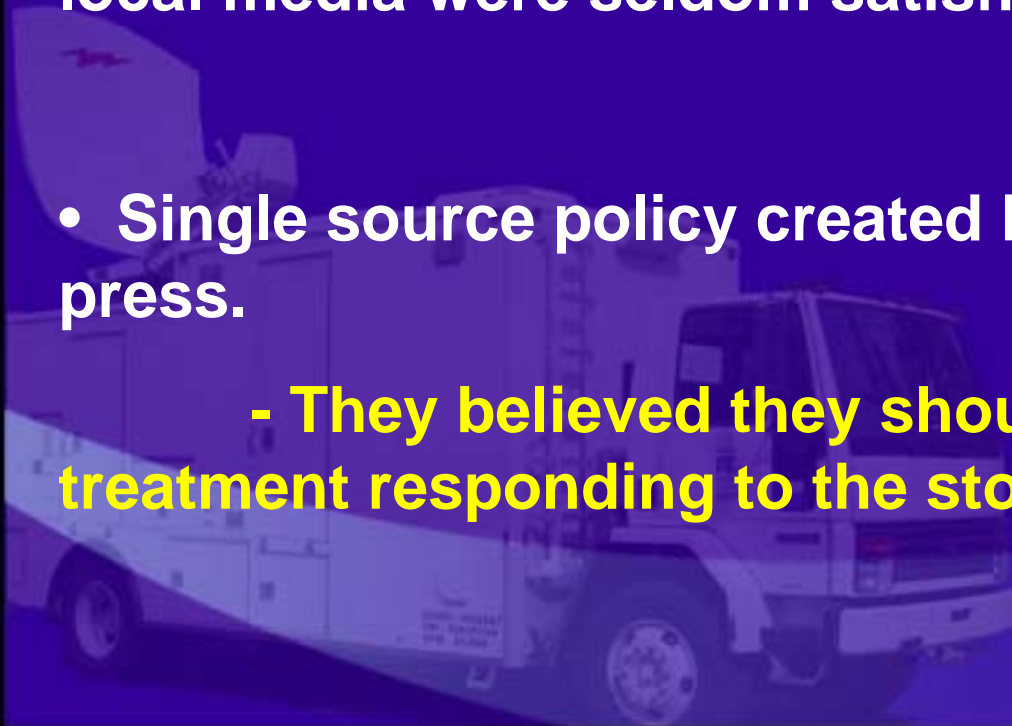


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Dealing with the media

- Mainstream media respected daily pressures, however, local media were seldom satisfied.
- Single source policy created hard feelings for local press.
 - They believed they should get preferential treatment responding to the story.



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LEAKS

HOW TO HANDLE THEM



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Media-leaks

“Off-the-record” comments

**Winks, gestures, coffee talk, or
A Friendly Tip?**

DON'T DO IT!!!

NOTE: Stay consistent. No exclusives, no “off-the-record” statements, or favored media. (This may be hard to do, but it will pay off in long term.)

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Media nicknamed Det. Ridenour the...

“Tip-less Wonder”



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Homicide Declaration - March 5, 2003

Family Response



- Relationship with Police stayed constant.
- Mutual trust gained by both parties
- Concerned about when/if Scott will ever be arrested.



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Dealing with the media

- When Laci's name, story and photograph became nationally known, we had to stop feeding the media.
- This created many new problems, leaks, rumors, TV pundits, supposed experts.
- Politicians and tabloids came out in full force.
- Mainstream media started interviewing and using tabloid journalism.



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SHOCK MEDIA

**TABLOIDS,
RADIO SHOCK JOCKS**

**DON'T LET THEM GET
TO YOU!**

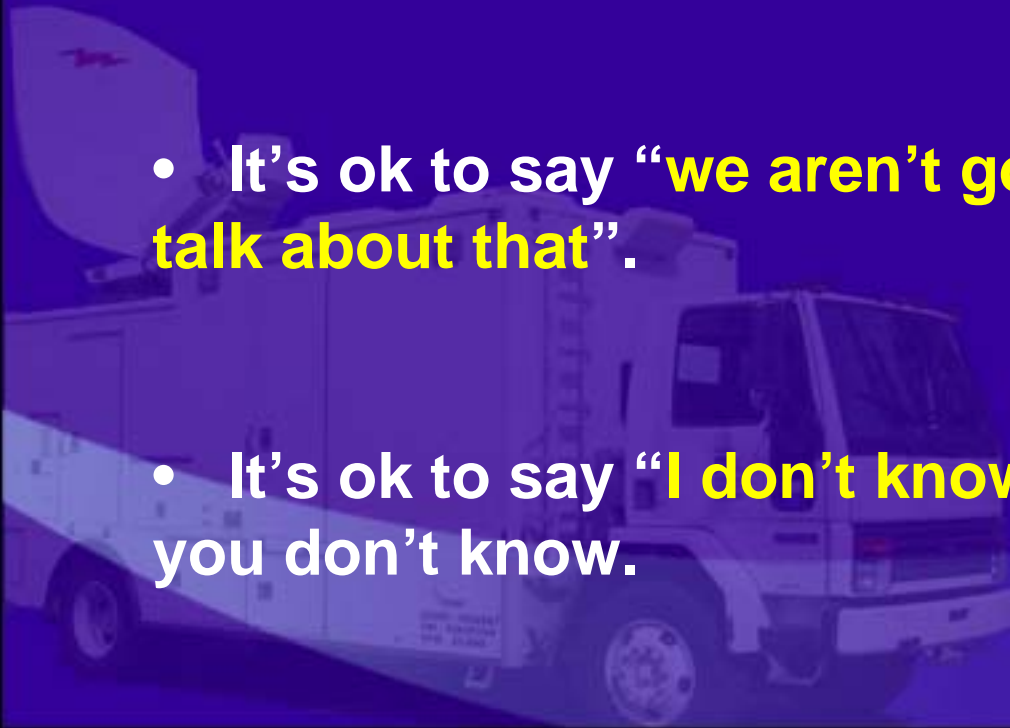


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CONTROL YOUR MESSAGE

- No matter how hard the media pushes, remember your mission and never give in.
- It's ok to say **"we aren't going to discuss this or talk about that"**.
- It's ok to say **"I don't know"** – if you don't know, you don't know.



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What role should the Chief take?



- The Chief is the leader of the organization.
- When should he talk to the press?
- PIO role vs. Chief.
- Who can best deliver the message?
- Buffer

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What role should the Chief take?



- Balance
- Do what we can
- Support our people
- Take shots, don't hide
- It's your case, it's your department
- Resource decisions
- Meeting with families
- Handle the politics

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Logistics in Responding to National Media

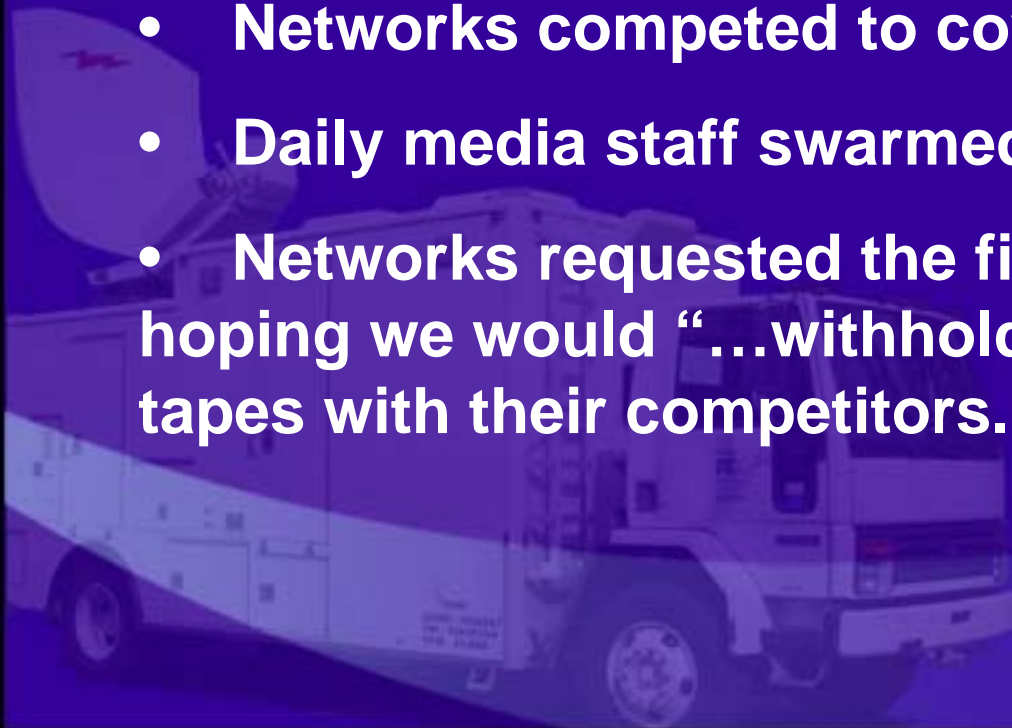


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Responding to the media's needs

- Executive producers v. producers in the field.
- Networks competed to cover “breaking news”.
- Daily media staff swarmed the department.
- Networks requested the first morning interviews hoping we would “...withhold from doing any pre-tapes with their competitors...”



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Responding to the media's needs



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Daily Lives of the Media



IN
DOWNTOWN MODESTO

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Laci's and Conner's Memorial - May 5, 2003

3,000 People Plus Media

- We had to organize the media.
- Police Department was used as a staging area.
- CNN was pool at the memorial.
- You must consider the mass logistics involved.



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Memorial at Covina Ave. Residence



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Press Update Website

- Cut PIO calls dramatically.
- Answered repetitive questions.
- Provided access around the world.
- Provided real time current information.



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Preliminary Hearing



HELD TO ANSWER

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MPD INVESTIGATORS



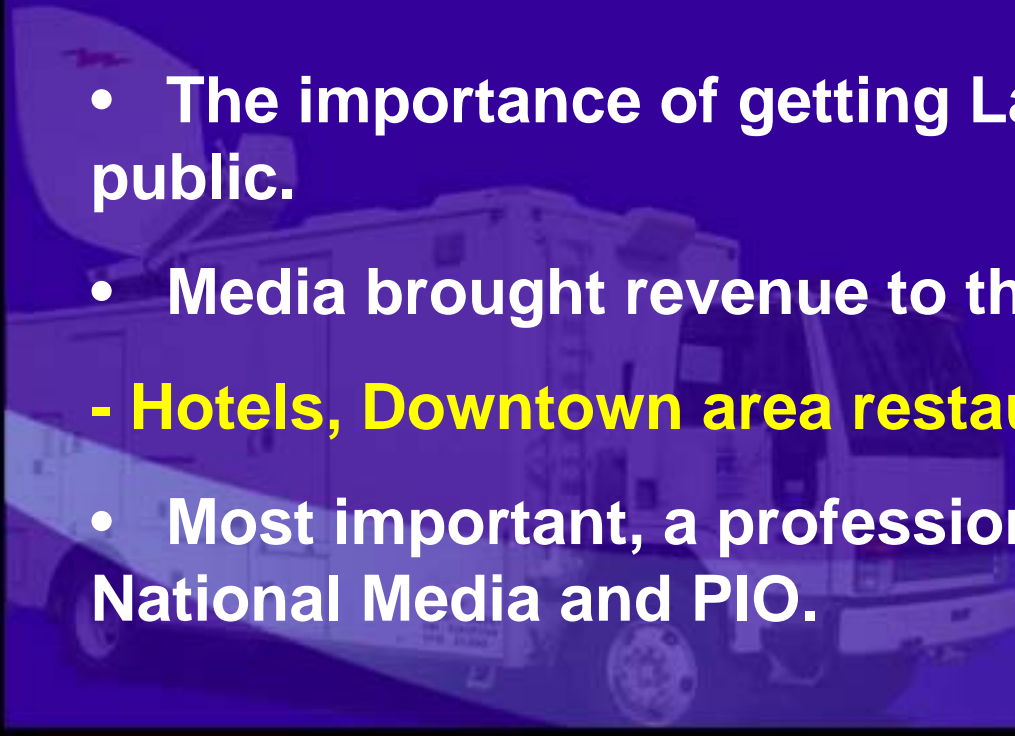
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Effects of the Media

While many aspects of mass media in our community were negative, there were some positives that resulted from the media presence.

- The importance of getting Laci's name out into the public.
- Media brought revenue to the city.
 - **Hotels, Downtown area restaurants and coffee houses.**
- Most important, a professional relationship with the National Media and PIO.



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Jury Sentence – December 14, 2004

**6 Month
Trial
In
Redwood
City**



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Conclusion and Lessons Learned



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Media Tips

- The PIO must act consistently with everyone in the media.
- The information you provide to the media must be given fairly and accurately.
- Don't allow the media to buy your meals or give you perks.

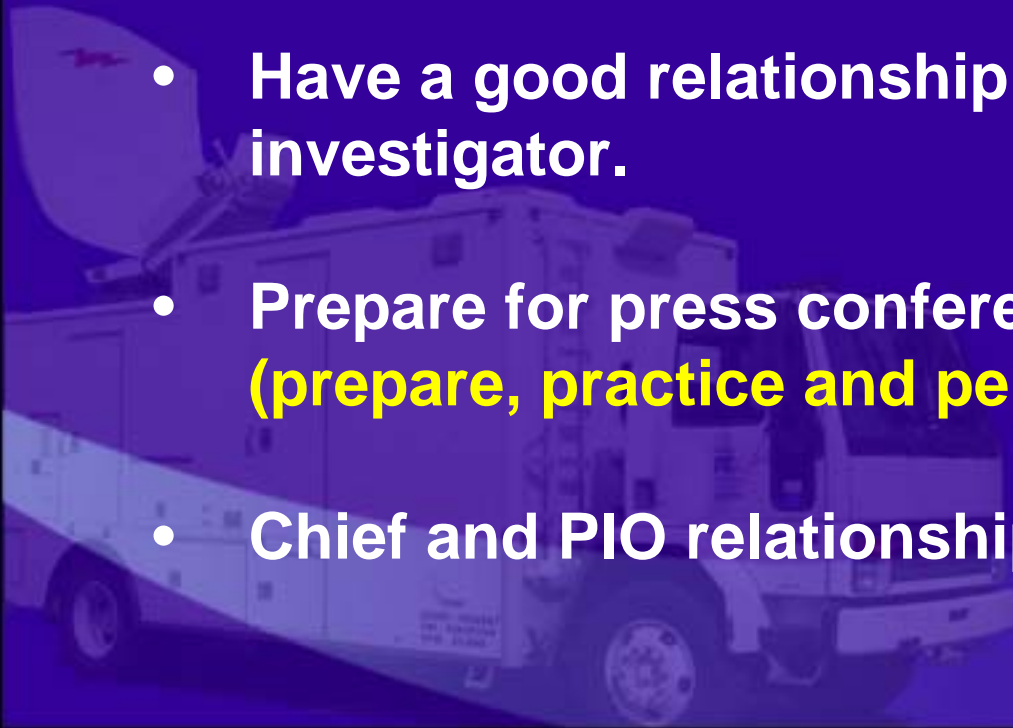


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Media Tips

- Establish a local/regional PIO group, then use them.
- Have a good relationship with your lead investigator.
- Prepare for press conferences and releases **(prepare, practice and perform.)**
- Chief and PIO relationship is paramount.



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Media Tips

- Media has a job to do, but only you can control your message.
- Remember the target audience.
- When talking to media always speak on the record
- Never speak off the record... “ Off-the-record does not exist.”
- Hold yourself accountable to your ethics and the standards that you set for yourself and your department.



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Chief Roy Wasden

Modesto Police Department

(209) 572-9503

Wasdenr@modestopd.com

